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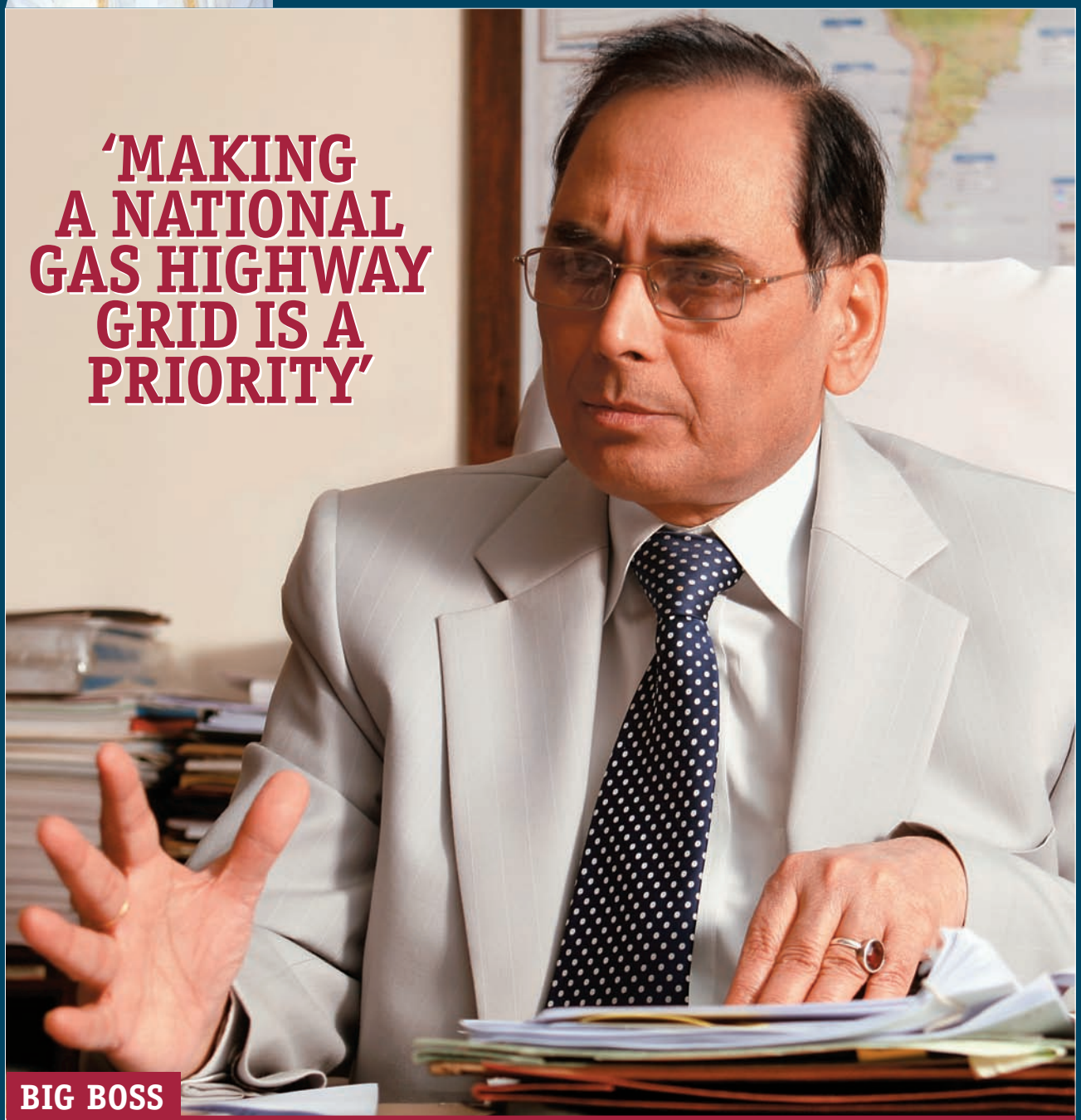
'MAKING A NATIONAL GAS HIGHWAY GRID IS A PRIORITY'



BIG BOSS

secretary, petroleum & natural gas | raghaw sharan pandey

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COVER PIC: RAJEEV DABRAL

BIG BOSS

raghaw sharan pandey

'We will pipe CNG to over 200 cities within five years'

PETROLEUM, aptly called "liquid gold", is one of the world's most sought-after fuels. Ninety per cent of the world uses petroleum products for locomotion. Wars have been fought over petroleum and the economies of many nations are dependent on it. In India, petroleum is governed by Raghaw Sharan Pandey. Originally from Bihar, the 1972-batch IAS officer from Nagaland has just implemented the concept of gas cyclinder booking via SMS in Delhi. Pandey, who has built a reputation for innovation, won the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration in 2007 for implementing the concept of communitisation or community participation in every aspect of administration.

interviewed by ANIL TYAGI *with inputs from* NARESH MINOCHA

gfiles: *You have served in the national capital, the centre of socio-economic development and policy-making, and Nagaland, which is one of the remotest parts of the country. Has this diversified experience given you special insight into developmental challenges faced by the country?*

Raghaw Sharan Pandey: The experiences have been deep and extremely diversified. The underdevelopment in Nagaland, the situations created by insurgency, and the challenge at the national level to deal with the diversity of the country in different sectors have all presented learning experiences. Governance in Nagaland has a dimension very different from most other parts of the country. In the State you deal with the situation at grassroots level. When I was Chief Secretary, Nagaland, there was a lack of financial resources and extreme cynicism in the society and in government circles. To manage day-to-day administration, we started "imagine Nagaland" – a motiva-

PHOTOS: RAJEEV DABRAL

'The 21st Century is said to be the century of gas. Gas is going to assume a greater role in the national economy for development of our industries.'

gfiles
INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT

VOL.3, ISSUE 8 | NOVEMBER 2009

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CONTACT DETAILS/ADVERTISING & MARKETING
118, 2ND FLOOR, DDA SITE 1,
NEW RAJINDER NAGAR, NEW DELHI – 110 060
TEL/FAX: +91-11-28744789, +91-11-45082832,
+91-9911110385
e-mail: gfilesindia@gmail.com
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From the Editor-in-Chief

THE "Big Boss" department of *gfiles* that usually features a top-ranking government official responsible for participating in the making and implementation of national policies runs unusually long in this issue. This is an act of editorial commission because we believe that the subject matter not only merits detailed discussion and analysis but is also of prime importance to readers who wish to understand the intricacies of an elemental force that drives today's economies—fuel. Or, as some describe it—black gold, whether liquefied or in a gaseous state.

And who better, in the Indian context, to elucidate on this subject than Raghaw Sharan Pandey, the country's erudite Secretary for Petroleum and Natural Gas who moved to his current position in 2008 after having served a successful stint at the Steel Ministry. As he puts it: "The Petroleum Ministry's single objective is to provide energy security in the country 24X7 at affordable prices." And that's one heck of a tall order for a country like India that imports 80 per cent of its oil requirements.

Even though petroleum products are making last-mile connectivity with India's remote regions, demands of the growing economy are soaring and set to grow by 3.6 per cent a year up to 2030. In fact, as he points out, the 21st Century is called the century of gas. The commodity is assuming an all-consuming role in the national economy for the development of India's industries.

But how does all this add up to ground level accomplishment when India lacks transportation arrangements, proper networking, or even storage facilities? These are some of the areas that Pandey addresses in this interview with forthrightness, candour and perspicacity that can only stem from hands-on administrative experience and grass-roots familiarity.

In totality, it is a formidable and daunting task – let us remember that no less a man than Barack Obama has set energy security for America as his top priority – and we wonder if an Indian Petroleum Secretary ever gets the luxury of a good night's sleep.

The nightmarish challenges must keep him awake forever, figuring out the complexities of meeting this core sector's administrative needs and reconciling the pressures of exploration, supply, demand, pricing, subsidies, marketing and handling an army of vested interests, both foreign and domestic.

Interviewer Anil Tyagi spares no questions, and Secretary Pandey spares no answers in this rollicking and robust interview that spans subjects such as developing a gas highway, creating basic storage capacity, the Iran-India-Pakistan gas pipeline project, LNG imports, subsidies on petroleum products, under-recoveries by oil marketing companies, taxes on aviation fuel, rationalized pricing, the Integrated Energy Policy, the level playing field under the New Exploration Licensing Policy, and the utilization of the Reliance Company's KG basin gas.

Without doubt, a must-read for all.

INDERJIT BADHWAR

LETTERS: The report, "Killing fields of Kaimur" (October 2009) was relevant and an eye-opener. The day I read it, the Rohtas police recovered a huge cache of ammunition including over 100 kg of explosives and 100 detonators at the district headquarters, Sasaram. Two women activists of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) were arrested. The district police suspect that the explosives were to be used to blast the Sasaram jail, where a large number of Maoists are lodged. The explosives were recovered from an area adjacent to the jail.

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LETTERS

Continued from page 3

During the last Lok Sabha polls, the Maoists attacked a BSF camp in the Kaimur hills. A jawan was grievously injured. The hilly terrain of Kaimur has been the centre of Maoist activities since the late 1970s. It also forms part of the Naxal corridor stretching to Palamau and Garhwa in Jharkhand.

Divya Ojha, Patna

"The great Indian non-speak" (September 2009) was a good article. The magazine is impressive.

Mukesh Rawat, via email

It is interesting to get a peek into the government's functioning through your magazine. At *The Times of India* in Lucknow, we have taken the initiative to carry RTI exposes on a regular basis. We were also the first to carry a story on Ram Kumar and can take modest pride in the fact that the Governor acted on the issue. Wish you and your team all the best and look forward to more such issues full of insight.

Ravi Krishna, via email

May the joy and merriment of Diwali brighten your life and the year ahead bring you luck. Happy Diwali to your entire team!

Rakesh Rawat, via email

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BIG BOSS

raghaw sharan pandey

Continued from page 2

tional exercise which led to the experiment of communitisation. We utilized the strength of social capital to improve administration.

gfiles: *In August 2008, you moved from the Steel Ministry to the Petroleum & Natural Gas Ministry. You have been Secretary in two core Ministries dealing with mineral resources. Has this experience helped you find commonalty or divergence on royalty, allocation of iron ore mines, allocation of gas, pressure from consumer groups to control steel or gas prices, and so on?*

RSP: Harnessing of natural resources for speedy industrialization and development is common to both. The difference is that steel price is not in the control regime. Key petroleum product prices are. Petroleum products are required on a daily basis by every household. With steel, that is not the case to that extent. Policies regarding the mines for iron ore and petroleum or natural gas are somewhat different. Wherever you are, you have to see that the sector develops and contributes to the economy to the maximum possible extent and you have to develop vision specific to the sector within the overall ambit of national development.

gfiles: *Between the Steel and Petroleum assignments, which is more challenging? Which offers more scope for policy innovation?*

RSP: Challenges are everywhere but Steel is somewhat smaller than Petroleum. The ramifications of Petroleum & Natural Gas are wider and its contribution to the national economy is more. Yet Steel is an extremely important sector and there is scope for policies and innovations everywhere.

gfiles: *You have been credited with the concept of long-distance gas highways. It figured in the Finance Minister's Budget speech in July. Can you elaborate on this concept and the larger domain of the national grid, and the road map for realizing this vision?*

RSP: The 21st Century is said to be the century of gas. Gas is going to assume a greater role in the national economy for development of our industries. The difficulty is that we don't have adequate gas transportation arrangements. Only some parts of the country have a network. Large parts of eastern, central and southern India have no pipelines. Gas has no meaning for these areas. So, on the pattern of national highways, gas highways also need to be developed in a coordinated manner with required investment, leading to a national gas grid.

gfiles: *Do you envisage Public-Private Partnership (PPP)?*

RSP: Yes, PPPP will be part of it.

gfiles: *How much investment do you envisage?*

RSP: It depends on how much of pipeline will be constructed.

gfiles: *How many km?*

RSP: We have 10,000 km of existing pipelines. The sky is the limit as far as the future is concerned. It's wrong to say that this will be our long-term target. We need to have a National Gas Highway Authority of India which will plan with continuity. The requirement of pipelines depends on the sources of gas and the likely demand. We have to think of ways, including PPP, to bring this about. At present, we produce about 141 mms cmd of gas. This is expected to increase by about 70 per cent by 2012. But the real issue is demand and transportation. The more gas you access, the more places you take it to – then the industry will come up. After we got HP gas pipelines, a good number of industries have grown around that.

gfiles: *So gas pipelines are needed for the future growth of India?*

RSP: Availability of gas, availability of transportation network and setting up

'There is a level playing field now under the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) between private and public sectors within India and the foreign investors.'

of industry is essential. And there the national gas grid is going to be extremely important.

gfiles: *For smooth functioning of any grid of continental dimensions, a string of gas storage dumps is a must to ease any disruption or cut in gas production as well as for national energy security. The US has hundreds of gas storage dumps. What are your plans on this count?*

RSP: We've not done much work in the area of gas storage. We've initiated some work in the area of oil storage and, according to international standards, we have to have a storage for about 90 days of oil consumption. We are working towards that, including investments from abroad in oil storage infrastructure.

gfiles: *Independently, or via tenders?*

RSP: We've started making some oil storage tanks with investment and research particularly from Gulf countries. We want to have more oil storage which will help them also – to keep for consumption and also for export to South East Asia because we are en route. So a paper has been developed and shared with them. Some have responded favourably.

For gas, we have not really started storage yet. There are many countries which have gas storage but it involves huge investment. We are concentrating on constructing pipelines.

gfiles: *What is the status of the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project? Apart from pricing, there is a larger issue of pipeline security, which even the superpowers won't guarantee. And this applies also to the Asian Development Bank-backed Turkenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline that can be extended to India.*

RSP: We are very much for the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline but are stuck because of security concerns and we are yet to reach an agreement on pricing. International negotiations take time but we need gas from abroad and Iranian gas is one possibility.

gfiles: *What's the bottleneck—Iran, security, Pakistan or international negotiations?*

RSP: It's the transit route. We need to have adequate security and for that negotiations will have to provide comfort. There is also the sea pipeline proposal but that has issues of expense. Let us see. Those who spend have to recover from the consumers. But the consumers have to get gas at reasonable price. Various possibilities are under consideration.

gfiles: *With the Russia-Ukraine standoff over pricing of piped gas and the consequent disruptions in supply to Europe, would it not be wiser to focus on import of gas as LNG and CNG, if the CNG shipping technology is viable?*

RSP: LNG import facilities are being augmented. We have taken steps to augment the existing terminal at Dahej in Gujarat and a new terminal at Kochi in Kerala. Private terminals are also coming up. So more LNG is going to be imported in due course. Regarding CNG import, there are questions of viability. I am told lower distances are more viable. With CNG, the biggest difficulty is pipelines. We have an ambitious programme. As against 35 cities today, we will take CNG to 202 cities by 2015. For CNG the requirement of gas is not so much. So maybe we won't need to import CNG. The domestic availability or the gas we are importing should do.

gfiles: *In August, the P&NG Minister told the Rajya Sabha a study to consider the feasibility of a uniform cost price regime for natural gas is being undertaken. The report is expected within three months. Does this proposal envisage pooling of prices of various domestic fields with LNG, including spot purchases and, if so, will it not herald a new form of administered price mechanism (APM)?*

RSP: The study has started. GAIL is getting it done. Electricity boards resource power from different sources but sell it at a uniform price in the state to a particular category of consumer. There are different gas pricing regimes. If there could be a uniform price, it would be good in many ways. Its feasibility, given the contractual arrangements which have been entered into with different categories of supplier and what could be the pulling mechanism, that is under study. Certainly the government can't provide any subsidy. So to what extent it will work out has to be seen. If it comes in, excepting spot gas, the rest of the gas will be brought under its ambit.

gfiles: *Are you moving towards setting up power and gas exchanges like BSE and NSE?*

RSP: That has not been thought yet.

One has to wait. We will study the proposal if somebody submits it.

gfiles: *There is a trade-off between price of natural gas and subsidies such as fertilizer subsidy and LPG subsidy. From the government revenue standpoint, is it better to subsidize gas or essential products derived from it?*

Let us take a hypothetical situation where the government buys gas from gas producers at a negotiated price of $4.2 per mmbtu and sells it at $1 per mmbtu to urea and LPG producers who are offered a fixed return of, say, 15 per cent on net worth. This would probably wipe out urea and LPG subsidy in one shot. Would that help the government reduce fertilizer and LPG subsidy as well as impart price stability to the economy because there would be no subsidy on value-addition that results during manufacturing? Has the government done any study on such or similar lines?

RSP: Subsidy is certainly a drain on the economy. But in case of items needed by vulnerable sections of the population, subsidies are provided by the government. There is no proposal to provide subsidy on basic raw material, that is, gas. Only some parts of gas which are known as APM gas are being sold at a price which is not determined by the market but is a cost plus price.

gfiles: *There is the issue of subsidization of petrol, diesel and PDS kerosene by upstream companies such as ONGC through discounts on crude supplies by non-oil refineries and by oil marketing companies through under-recoveries on sale of these products. Has this problem been studied by the expert group on petroleum products pricing proposed in the Finance Minister's Budget speech?*

RSP: The Kirit Parikh Committee, set up after the speech, will go into all this. Into questions also about whether to subsidize and to what extent, the source of subsidy, whether it will be from upstream, and if so to what extent.

gfiles: *After the dismantling of APM in April 2002, which included the decision to reduce and shift the kerosene and LPG subsidies to the Consolidated Fund of India, how come the hydrocarbons industry is burdened with these subsidies as well as subsidy of decontrolled petrol and diesel? Will the government again extend the kerosene and LPG subsidy, currently valid up to March 31, 2010, as per the Cabinet decision in October 2007?*

[The Government Resolution dated November 21, 1987 on phased dismantling of APM by April 2002 clearly stated that subsidy on LPG would be reduced to 15 per cent of import parity price (IPP) and 33.33 per cent of IPP on kerosene and the subsidy would be borne by the government directly through the budget. In March 2002, the government reiterated its decision that the subsidy on LPG and kerosene would be borne out of the Consolidated Fund of India. It said: "After adjusting the flat rate of subsidy, the retail prices of these subsidized products will vary with the price of oil in the international market." The government also expressed its resolve to phase out LPG and kerosene subsidies in three to five years. In October 2007, the government reviewed the position of fiscal subsidies on LPG and SKO and extended the schemes till March 31, 2010.]

'We are very much for the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline but are stuck because of security concerns and we are yet to reach an agreement on pricing.'

RSP: As I mentioned earlier, at present subsidies are being given on four items, including kerosene and LPG. For this year, there is a decision by the government that for LPG and kerosene the subsidy burden will be borne by the government whether through budgetary process or through issues of oil bond that will be clear when the supplementary Budget is presented. In future what will happen I can't say. Let us wait for the Kirit Parikh Committee recommendations.

gfiles: *After dismantling of APM, at least three expert groups have grappled with the problem of taxation and subsidization of petroleum products and yet the problems remain as complex as ever. Does this suggest lack of political will to strike a durable solution that may hurt some stakeholders in the short run but would benefit the economy in the long run?*

[The first committee was formed by the Finance Ministry in the last quarter of 2004 under Chief Economic Adviser Ashok Lahiri (who is now Indian director at ADB) to suggest a new tariff structure that could cope with the sharp rise in crude prices in the global markets. The second committee was formed at the PMO's behest in October 2005 to study pricing and taxation of petroleum products under the chairmanship of economist C Rangarajan. The third committee was formed in 2008 under Planning Commission Member BK Chaturvedi to revisit the concept of under-recoveries by oil marketing companies in

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SAIL has supplied over 14000 metric tonnes of steel for the Worli-Bandra Sea link

Since its inception SAIL has significantly contributed in the development of all major infrastructure in the country. SAIL steel has been and presently is being used in several projects of national importance. A few are listed below:

Chandrayaan – SAIL supplied steel for tanks used to store liquid propellant in the Reaction Control System package of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) which carried the Chandrayaan-1 satellite into space.

Mumbai Airport - M/s GMR has entrusted the job of modernisation of Mumbai Airport to Pratibha Pipes & Structurals Pvt. Ltd. who have completed a major portion of the job using Plates and SAIL TMT.

Shivalik – Specially toughened warship grade SAIL steel was used in the Shivalik, the first Indian warship to be made with Indian steel.

J&K Railway Line - This 340-km-long railway line will join the Kashmir valley with the Indian Railways network. The project area falls in seismic zone-V. SAIL steel is being used because of its reliability and durability.

Power Projects - SAIL is supplying various steel products, for major thermal and hydro power projects such as Barh, Chandrapur, Mejia, Dadri, Jhajjar, Simhadri, Lower Subansiri etc. It is primarily supplying plates, SAIL TMT bars and structurals among other products.

Worli-Bandra Sea link - Promoted by Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation, this link connects the island city of Mumbai with its western suburbs.

SAIL has supplied over 14000 metric tonnes of steel for this project.

Delhi Metro – Delhi Metro has become the pride of nation's capital within a very short time. SAIL is proud to be a contributor in making of this metro-marvel.

Tsunami Rehabilitation Social Infrastructure Project - SAIL supplied light structurals, SAIL JYOTI GP/GC sheets, SAIL TMT, PM Plates and HSM Plates for this rehabilitation project undertaken at Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Irrigation Development – SAIL has provided various sizes and grades of steel for several irrigation projects across the country such as Tapi, Indirasagar, Rajivsagar, among others.

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RSP: There is no lack of political will. What is needed, and it is happening, is to understand the pros and cons of this decision. On the one hand, we have to ensure that the wild marketing companies get their due. On the other, we have to make sure that these are vital inputs to the economy and to the common man's consumption. Therefore, we have to have appropriate pricing. So a kind of balancing is needed. There are three kinds of pricing regimes in the world:

First is the one including the US, UK and most of Europe. OSDC countries are in this group. There is total freedom on pricing, the companies decide the pricing.

Second is the one in developing countries, including India, China, our other neighbours, and Russia. The government fixes the prices. It's not that it's always controlled at a particular level, it goes up or down.

Third is the one in countries where kerosene and petrol are very cheap. These are mostly West Asian countries and some Latin American countries where production is in abundance.

What course India will take has been debated from time to time. There have been reforms like oil marketing companies are being given refineries gate price partly from upstream, partly from government, partly from consumers. Let's wait for this committee's report.The government has to balance the interest of the producing companies as well as of consumers.

gfiles: *Aviation turbine fuel, whose price is fixed on the norms of import parity pricing, accounts for the largest component of variable cost of the airline industry. This product is over-taxed, especially by the States. It is also hard to import due to infrastructure constraints and foreign trade policy regulations. An empowered Group of Ministers on aviation is reportedly studying the problem of taxation and pricing. What does your Ministry offer in resolution?*

RSP: ATF pricing is free pricing. When international crude price goes up or down, ATF price goes up or down. So the pricing is international but there is a huge element of taxation. Taxation is the domain of the state governments. It has been debated from time to time. Let's hope some taxation reforms come about. The Ministry of Petroleum has little role. Our Minister has written to the Chief Ministers that the taxation on ATF has to come down. There has been no response. It has been debated in the Finance Ministry also. The standing committee of Finance Ministers also debated the issue. Let's hope a solution is found.

gfiles: *Your Ministry has drawn flak on the regulatory count from different quarters, including the Planning Commission's Integrated Energy Policy (IEP) status update.*

The upstream regulator, Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) is considered weak and controlled by the Ministry. Do you have any plans to grant it full autonomy?

As for the downstream regulator, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB), the Ministry has not empowered it fully by not invoking certain provisions of the PNGRB Act. There is some ongoing litigation between PNGRB and the Ministry.

[In its IEP presentation before the full meeting of the Planning Commission chaired by the Prime Minister in September, the Commission said: "Regulatory regime in upstream and downstream in petroleum needs major overhaul." In the separate detailed note on IEP implementation status, the Commission pointed out that IEP's recommendation for making both regulators independent had not been implemented by the Ministry. The note said the Ministry was "exercising a strong control" over DGH and PNGRB functioned with "curtailed powers". It continued: "Several of its functions are yet to be notified." The Board is so far authorized to regulate only natural gas pipelines. The notifications regarding oil pipelines and marketing of petroleum products is pending.]

RSP: There is a level playing field now under the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) between private and public sectors within India and the foreign investors. There is no bias towards, say, ONGC as such in the NELP. Now DGH is in a way administering the NELP process. Even if it becomes fully autonomous, one has to see what difference it will make. At present, DGH is like a technical adviser to the Ministry and in some respects the Ministry takes decisions based on DGH recommendations. So if you make DGH independent, it will take all the decisions. But I don't think that would make too much of a difference. Then, as far as the downstream regulator is concerned, there are certain lacunae in the Act. Therefore, all its sections have not been invoked. There are also areas where certain actions of the Board have to be speeded up. We are in the process of amending the Act. Legal opinion has been obtained.

gfiles: *Can the dream of IEP be realized without making all energy sources tax-neutral and without creating a level playing field for all players in all sectors?*

RSP: For investors, we have certainly created level fields. But it's utopian to feel that the level of taxation will be substantially reduced. On petroleum, taxation is indeed high. Petroleum is the highest tax earner for the Central as well as State government. About a third of the State revenue comes from petroleum products. About 65 per cent of central excise revenue comes from petroleum.

gfiles: *Is it impossible to reduce the taxes?*

'We've not done much work in the area of gas storage. We've initiated some work in the area of oil storage. We have to have a storage for about 90 days of oil consumption.'

RSP: Well, it depends on the States. In the Central government some touching up can be done from time to time but then the income from such taxation is so high that if you reduce it, the revenues go down substantially.

gfiles: *Don't you think the pre-requisite for an IEP is an integrated energy regulator that should oversee coal, electricity, petroleum & natural gas, renewables and nuclear energy? Alternatively, should there not be a super-regulator in the energy sector comprising chairmen of all sector-specific regulators, including the proposed coal regulator, to integrate sector-specific policies and to balance conflicting interests, say, between coal producers and coal-based power generators?*

RSP: Let us not expect too much of the regulators. There are regulators in different sectors in electricity, P&NG. The government is also, in a way, a regulator. Government policies do provide level playing fields to a great extent. If there is one integrated energy regulator, that can also work. If there are two, three regulators in different sectors, these are also working. It all depends what role you give the regulator and how the regulator functions. Merely having one regulator will not solve all the problems.

gfiles: *Is there any move to restructure public sector oil and gas companies through mergers, demergers, holding company, and so on?*

[The Ministry had explored the idea of restructuring through the Advisory Committee on Synergy in Energy that it constituted in January 2005 under the Chairmanship of V Krishnamurthy, who is currently Chairman, National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council.]

RSP: We are not pursuing the Synergy in Energy concept at present. There are ways to make the existing companies more effective and these are being pursued. There could be some restructuring within the organizations.

gfiles: *Is there a need for more PSUs in the oil sector to diversify?*

RSP: No. Within the PSUs, there are varying needs. Like, can a big company have more subsidiaries of its own in certain areas? These are thoughts being explored. It'll be premature to speak more on this now.

gfiles: *Your Ministry had reportedly urged the Cabinet Secretariat to constitute a new EGOM on gas allocation. Has that been done to facilitate utilization of Reliance's KG basin gas? Why can't the government revive the inter-ministerial gas linkage committee which used to be chaired by the Petroleum Secretary and which did a commendable job?*

RSP: The new EGOM has been constituted. It's going to look into gas utilization. More gas is expected to be produced. This is going to be distributed sector- and company-wise and the matter will be put before the committee. The earlier gas linkage committee was done away with in 2004. After that, most of the major production of gas has been from KGD6. For NELP gas, this EGOM was constituted which functioned in the last government. In this government also, the EGOM will decide on gas utilization.

gfiles: *Is there any plan to modify the gas utilization policy by taking into account requirements of the petrochemicals sector and the pivotal role of gas in energy security that can be realized by converting gas into methanol for subsequent conversion into dimethyl ether, which is a perfect diesel substitute? The policy, in fact, does not factor in the role of domestic gas as a foreign exchange saver and substitute for imported crude. This can be done only by increased allocation of gas to CNG stations as they help substitute petrol and diesel.*

RSP: The gas utilization policy which has been enunciated now has identified some areas of utilization of gas. The priority areas are fertilizer, power, LPG, city gas distribution system. The EGOM has also decided that in future we should allocate gas to sectors like refineries, petrochemicals. So far only four areas have been allocated gas – power, fertilizer, LPG and city gas. Let's see which other areas get how much gas.

gfiles: *How much gas are you expecting?*

RSP: In the KG basin, from the present level of 40 it's going to go up to 80 in due course.

gfiles: *The just-completed international competitive bidding under NELP and under coal bed methane (CBM) has attracted a poor response from investors. Of the 70 blocks offered, 34 did not elicit even a single bid. What are the reasons and do you intend to address the pricing and marketing concerns of investors by*

modifying the model production sharing contracts for the next round of bidding?

RSP: Yes, it's less this time. Out of 70 blocks under NELP, 36 received bids. Out of 10 blocks under CBM, eight received bids. This comes to a little over 50 per cent if you combine the two. Even under NELP, it's a little over 40 per cent. Merely on this basis, can you say that it had a very poor response? You have to understand the international environment. When we started NELP and CBM bidding, we knew that this year there is a downturn in the global economy. Investment sentiment is not as ebullient as earlier. So, the choice before us was to go ahead with the bidding or stop it. If we had stopped it, we would not have bid any block or we would have waited for good times to return. When that would have happened, nobody knows. The best antidote to a downturn is to generate economic activity to the extent possible. Next, we decided to package a larger number of blocks so that even if some were bid for, at least exploration activity would start. We got bids for over 50 per cent. In no country this year have bids been higher than this. This includes Brazil, Norway, Indonesia, Uruguay and quite a few other countries.

Finally, all these are awarded, if exploration starts in all. This is a very large number itself, apart from the percentage. The minimum assured investment amounts to $1.3 billion in NELP alone. Compare this with NELP7, which many people would say was a very successful round. At that time, it was less than 1.7, it's slightly more than $1.2 billion.

Third, in the last NELP how many blocks were put up for bidding, and finally auctioned, and for which you got investment. It varies between 20 to 30 for NELP1 to NELP5. In NELP6 and 7, it was higher. In NELP8, it's 36.

Fourth, some people say ONGC made the maximum number of bids.

'The Ministry's objective is to provide energy security in the country. This means you get energy 24x7 for its industries and for its citizens at affordable prices.'

ONGC is the single bidder in 19 blocks, this year in 21 blocks. So it's in the same league. I don't know on what basis people are saying it's very poor. It's poor in that sense, that you put up a much larger number of blocks and a little over half received bids.

What we've done was right. Let's hope the number that got bids is awarded and exploration activity starts. If every year 20, 30 blocks are given out, it's fine. If we had offered fewer blocks, maybe we would have got less bids. Also, we offered blocks for big and small investors, deep and shallow waters, all land, and so on.

There is no pricing and no marketing which really affected the bidding. The marketing and pricing principles have been broadly right from NELP1 to NELP8.

gfiles: *How much oil do you import?*

RSP: We import about 80 per cent of our requirement.

gfiles: *How do you view the Petroleum Ministry in totality?*

RSP: The Petroleum Ministry's single objective is to provide energy security in the country. What is energy security? You get energy 24x7 for its industries and for its citizens at affordable prices. Many petroleum products are reaching every nook and corner of this country. Our demands are set to grow, we are set to grow by 3.6 per cent per annum up to 2030.

gfiles: *What's the energy consumption in India per capita?*

RSP: It's one-seventh of that in the US and about one-third of that in the world. But it will increase by 3.6 per cent per annum on an average against 1.6 per cent per annum for the world at large. It's a function of growth in economy. We'll be one of the major consumers by 2030. Beyond 2030, India will be among the largest consumers of energy even on a per capita basis. g

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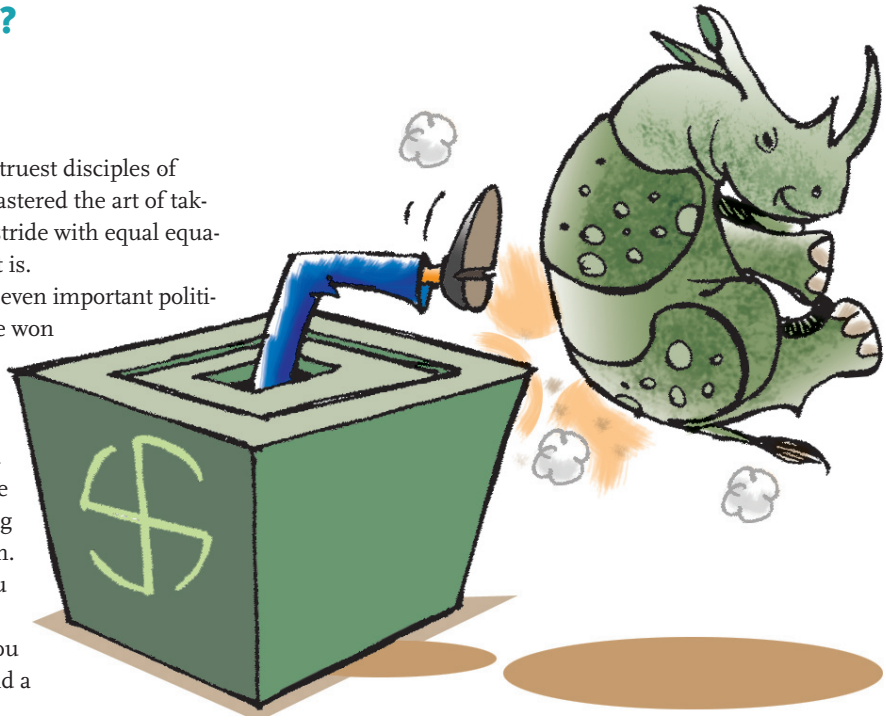
ECOLOGY OUR MISSION OUR OBSESSION

Less is more in politics?
devendra yadav rocks after loss



POLITICIANS are probably the truest disciples of Lord Krishna. For they have mastered the art of taking defeat and victory in their stride with equal equanimity. Electoral defeat or victory, that is.

No longer does it seem to matter to even important politicians of the country whether they have won or lost. Look at Devendra Yadav. This RJD stalwart, known for his proximity to Lalu Yadav, lost in the last Lok Sabha election. It has affected him not one whit. He now has a house in Delhi worth a crore of rupees. Along with that, he has a car worth Rs 15 lakh.

So the trend seems to be that, if you win, you get five years of heaven-like Parliament and everlasting glory; if you lose, you acquire incredible wealth and a heavenly life.

Anti-Naxal war unprecedented
Mining firms urge final solution

WITH, thankfully, no major terrorist attack for some months, the government is focusing on preparing for an anti-Naxalite war. The Army is to be deployed in Naxalite-ravaged states like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Now, though no one endorses the politics of violence practised by the Naxalites, not everybody is convinced of the need to use the Army. There is also a degree of amazement at this all-out offensive against the Naxalites, especially as the heads of successive governments have treated it as a socio-economic problem.

South Block's grapevine has it that this time the big push has come from a Minister who was earlier a lawyer for mining companies operating in the affected areas. His wife too has been a lawyer for several firms. It is common knowledge that these companies have spent a small fortune on royalty payments to undertake mining in designated areas. The Naxalites have wreaked havoc with their business so they intend to finish them off once and for all.

So, it boils down to being a miners' war....!

Jaswant boots out predecessors
no ex-chairmen's photos in pac chamber

HAVING been unceremoniously dumped by the BJP for praising Mohammad Ali Jinnah's secular credentials in a book, Jaswant Singh – as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament – has ordered removal of the photographs lining his chamber in the Parliament House complex. The collection includes photographs of those who have headed the PAC since 1921. Most are Englishmen, though there is a decent number of Indian leaders who have also headed this important Parliamentary committee. The latter includes Atal Bihari Vajpayee, PV Narasimha Rao, Vijay Kumar Malhotra and others. Jaswant's photograph should rightfully be part of this elite group of Parliamentarians.

ILLUSTRATIONS: ARUNA

However, he appears to have decided he won't have any of the past chairmen of the PAC looking on at him in his chamber. Work to remove the photographs has begun. The staff is perplexed at the strange order and wonders what has prompted the erstwhile BJP stalwart to take such an unusual step.

Mallya's gift for mom buys island for rs 120 cr

SONS, rich or poor, will move mountains for their mothers in their hearts. The only difference is that a rich one can sometimes actually do what his poorer counterpart can only dream of. Liquor tycoon Vijay Mallya is well known for his lavish lifestyle and flamboyance. He has also developed a reputation for giving fabulously expensive gifts. When it came to his mother, with whom he shares a very strong bond, he decided on a truly memorable gift. So our man went and bought an island somewhere in Europe as a gift for his mother. The cost was a paltry Rs 120 crore. Well, it's peanuts when compared with the thousand crore rupees that Mallya owes oil companies, vendors, advertising agencies, newspapers and magazines. g

MASSIVE MO

The terrorist attack flung open the doors for arms mercha nt dormant for long, not progressing even in stages, was su d

by Diptendra Raychaudhuri

IT took the attack on Mumbai by a group of gunmen who arrived by boat, entered the city undetected and then went about their business of death and destruction to make India's security establishment awaken to the threat the country faces.

Much before 26/11, the Mumbai police were to be armed and upgraded. But, as the panel conducting investigations after the terrorist attack discovered, this did not happen due to several instances of delay and indecision. The delay had other ramifications. The panel, consisting of veteran bureaucrat Ram Pradhan and former RAW official V Balachandran, said: "The draft weapon policy of changing this into 7.62 SLRs, 5.56 Insas rifles, AK-47s and 9-mm carbines was approved on June 30, 2008. Due to the delay in approving the draft weapon policy, the cost shot up from Rs 168 crore to Rs 210 crore."

Such indecision and delay plagued every State and Central government prior to 26/11. According to sources, the government has already purchased, or is in the process of purchasing, arms and equipment worth over Rs 2,000 crore. By about 2014, the figure will cross Rs 10,000 crore. And this does not include Army purchases.

It is doubtful whether the government would have spent even a fourth of this amount on arms purchases if 26/11 had not occurred.

Let us start with the Mumbai police.

After 26/11, the Maharashtra government came out with an initial plan to modernize its police force at a cost of Rs 120 crore. An array of weapons and bullet-proof vehicles has already been provided to the Mumbai police's first responders, who are supposed to man the city and respond to every crisis situation. State-of-the-art weapons are being imported from the US and Germany for a force that had mainly

.303 rifles. It is being provided Smith and Wesson pistols, MP 9 tactical pistols, grenade launchers and bullet-proof combat vehicles. Mumbai police sources say the modernization will continue and Rs 120 crore is the budget for just the first phase.

Now, the Central government.

Home Minister P Chidambaram said, at the 25th Raising Day celebrations of the National Security Guard (NSG): "We have authorized NSG requisition of civil aircraft. NSG is in the process of inducting high technology and new weapons. The process of inducting sophisticated state-of-the-art weapons is in the final stages." It is well known that, during the Mumbai attack, it took the NSG seven hours to reach Mumbai from Manesar, Haryana. "After 26/11, the role of the NSG has been redefined. We have established four hubs at Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata, and two regional centres with an essential force of 5,000 each," said Chidambaram.

The Ministry of Defence has given the go-ahead for acquisition of several

The government has already purchased, or is in the process of purchasing, arms and equipment worth over Rs 2,000 crore. By about 2014, the figure will cross Rs 10,000 crore. And this doesn't include Army purchases.

BILIZATION

ha nts. The process of arms purchase, which had been su ddenly thrown onto the fast track following 26/11

Mumbai police with outmoded weapons (left); tactical pistols, bullet-proof vest (above): new preparations

sophisticated items for the NSG to combat an organized terror attack – grenade launchers, night vision and reflex sight equipment, radio-controlled detonators, remote detonating devices and guided air delivery systems. Keeping in mind that the equipment is for use by over 20,000 commandos, Ministry officials claim the purchase for the NSG will go beyond Rs 1,000 crore in the next couple of years.

The government is also purchasing Aerostat air defence radars from Israel and fast interception vessels for the Navy. On the general list of purchase for all commando units of all security agencies are machine guns with night vision, under-barrel grenade launchers, and remote detonating devices. In March this year, the Ministry cleared urgent acquisition of a variety of arms and equipment, the bulk of which will be used by the Ghatak commandos attached to every infantry battalion. The Ministry was reportedly looking at the US government's FMS (foreign military sales) route to equip the commando units. Orders are being placed for the Heckler and Koch MP5 submachine guns too.

During the Mumbai attack, the Navy was alarmed by the proximity of the terrorists' strike area to its Western Command headquarters. The Navy is reportedly raising a 1,000-strong Sagar Prahari Bal to protect its assets. It is in urgent need of 80 fast-interception craft. According to sources, balloon-mounted air defence radars that can detect a low-flying aircraft within a range of 500 km have also been sanctioned.

The numerical strength of personnel is also being increased. Vacancies against sanctioned strength in the Maharashtra police stood at 230,567 on January 1, 2008. Now, it is down to less than 150,000. According to Home Ministry sources, the States have been instructed to bring the deficit to zero by the end of March 2010. To arm this additional force will entail further cost.

The Ministry has sanctioned a 20 per cent increase in the number of Coast Guard vessels. Manpower will also be increased. And they will not be rifle-wielding personnel like the state police. According to one estimate, the government will spend about Rs 8,000 crore for the Coast Guard over five to seven years. The list initially sanctioned includes 40 new patrol vessels, 30 helicopters, 12 surveillance aircraft and 20 interceptor boats.

THE Army is short of 11,387 officers, against a current authorized strength of 46,615 (24.43 per cent deficit). The Navy is 1,512 officers short of its sanction of 8,797 (17.2 per cent deficit) and the Air Force needs 1,400 officers to meet its sanction of 12,128 (11.5 per cent deficit). The government is looking at ways to bridge these gaps.

The government is planning to go in for a Static Coastal Radar Chain that will employ a few hundred coastal radars. The Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, and National Technical Research Organization are slated to acquire updated technology.

Observers estimate the total purchases in the next five years will go beyond Rs 10,000 crore. They emphasize that, even if the government purchases half of what it proposes to, that would be remarkable. However, with Chidambaram's dynamic track record, it would not be surprising if the amount goes up to Rs 20,000 or beyond.

And all because we were attacked by Kesab & Co. g

The Ministry of Defence is acquiring sophisticated items for the NSG–grenade launchers, night vision and reflex sight equipment, radio-controlled detonators, remote detonating devices and guided air delivery systems.

The scheme to guarantee rural employment is begining to crack under t

Spreading Ru

by Amarendra Kishore

ABOUT a year ago, when the cry of "*Hisab do, jawab do* (Be accountable, answer the people)" rose in Uttar Pradesh, it became clear that the path ahead was going to be littered with thorns for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). Controversies emerging from social audits in Dungarpur (Rajasthan), Anantpur (Andhra Pradesh) and Palamau (Jharkhand) and the resulting uproar showed that NREGA was prey to the usual malaise affecting government schemes. Despite the exclusion of contractors and strict regulations for payment of wages, media reports, surveys and research reports present a shocking state of affairs after three years of NREGA's implementation.

To begin with, the conceptualization of the scheme had inherent flaws. And those at the grass-roots level are acutely aware of this. "NREGA is a shining example of decentralization of power in the age of *gram swarajya* (village self-rule)," says Dayaveer Singh of Behror, Rajasthan. "The *gram* panchayats were to play a leading role in the implementation and operation of this scheme. The policymakers believed that only the panchayat committees were capable of registering the rural workers. But they were unaware that, even after so many years of Panchayati Raj, the village panchayats are dependent on government officials right from block level to district level."

"There is no independent Secretary or *pradhan* for NREGA like the block chief (Secretary). If there is no Secretary for each panchayat at the block level, one Secretary looks after two or three panchayats. He has the additional burden of NREGA," says Harishankar Singh of Nawada district, Bihar. Employment Secretary for NREGA sounds an important post but, in fact, his inexperience in issues pertaining to rural development result in the failure of development programmes.

"The patwari takes Rs 30 to 50 per person to make a job card," says Kedar Pande of Bhabhua. District council members in Sitamarhi have filed a complaint that officials do not issue the NREGA dues without deducting their commission. There are reports from UP about workers being paid less than minimum wages. The tribals of various blocks of Bolangir district in Orissa do not get work. "Their job cards have been kept by Village Level Workers. They are compelled by the local administration to put their signature or thumb impression saying they were provided work for 100 days and they are paid Rs 3,000 to 4,000. The remaining amount is drawn by the block-level government officials," says Bal Gopal Mishra, ex-MLA of Luisinga.

"The main challenge is to ensure that

Despite the exclusion of contractors and strict regulations for payment of wages, media reports, surveys and research reports present a shocking state of affairs after three years of NREGA's implementation.

Twisting NREGA – Work w

IN many parts of India, the poorest section of the rural populace eat only after they get their daily wage at the end of the day. The principle of "*aaj ka kaam aur aaj ka bhoogtaan* (today's work and today's payment)" is very common. For this reason, NREGA provided for at least part payment of wages on a daily basis. However, in most cases, this provision has remained only on paper. The final payment of wages must be made within seven days and not later than 15 days. But there are people (for instance in Khunti block, Jharkhand) who have not received payment for the past seven months. There are reports that in Jharkhand and Orissa people have not received wages for over a year.

A recent survey by Jean Dréze corroborated that in several villages workers

er the weight of poor implementation and widespread corruption

ural Fraud

k without pay

had not received wages for two months and more. Workers from the Saiyapur *gram* panchayat in Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh have not received wages for work done in December 2008. Consequently, hundreds of labourers from various districts of UP demonstrated in front of their respective block offices in June this year, demanding immediate payment of the pending wages.

"There have been so many controversies in Jharkhand about NREGA, and the list of scams is getting longer by the day, to the extent that several district collectors are said to be in favour of closing it down," says Jhabboo Lal of Gumla. The salaries of 500 Giridih officials were blocked by the Deputy Commissioner for tardy progress of projects under NREGA.

rural workers are able to secure their entitlements under the Act, including not only work on demand but also minimum wages, payment within 15 days, essential worksite facilities, and so on," says Kishore Sahu of Kusurla village in Kalahandi, Orissa.

One of NREGA's major drawbacks is the household approach. It has led to much confusion, especially as the term "household" is not well defined in the Act. Taking the individual worker as the basic unit throughout the system would help to streamline NREGA records and achieve transparency. This approach would also facilitate equal participation of women in NREGA. Women would have their own job cards and bank accounts, instead of depending on the goodwill of male relatives. "One person, one job card, one bank account" should be the basic principle.

A question also arises regarding the parameters for NREGA's success. Is success to be determined by distributing job cards to a large number of people and providing them 100 days of employment, or by providing access to sustainable means of income by optimum utilization of local resources? Can the scheme be deemed successful if the allocated amount has been spent without fraud?

Another factor hampering success is vested interests. "Over 160 districts of 14 states are in the grip of extremists. Why would these outfits let NREGA be successful when they are staunchly opposed to the system and administration?" points out Vinit Kumar of Raipur.

Also, the need for such a scheme is not uniform. "In areas like Rohtas-Kaimur-Bhagalpur, there is large consumption of manpower in paddy cultivation or other types of agrarian activities. So wage labourers come here to work. The wage under NREGA is Rs 108 per head per day in Rohtas district of Bihar, whereas the labourers are paid Rs 120 per day. There is no seasonal or other kind of migration from here, so there is no need for NREGA in our area," says local journalist Alok Chamaria of Sasaram.

SOME economists say NREGA activists are messing up the labour market by creating "artificial" employment. "NREGA is preventing labour from going to high demand markets and thereby giving rise to a shortage of labour," laments Bal Gopal Mishra. The reality is that this is enhancing bargaining power by providing alternative employment opportunities.

"This is not a bad thing. It does mean that employers in those areas may have to pay higher wages, and perhaps even the minimum wage," says Jean Dreze, economist and key architect of NREGA. But it is a well known fact that in far too many instances guilty officials are not punished, social audits are not followed up, payment of wages is delayed and violence against those seeking to make the scheme work goes unchecked.

"Employment guarantee schemes based on agrarian thinking are needed today. But the situation demands that they have a scientific basis," says Dr Vijaypani Pande, a Ranchi-based social scientist. "In the absence of this, NREGA's promise of 100 days' employment to the uneducated and ignorant masses and its claims to benefit the poor seem to be alienated from the real needs of the common man." g

Gasping for Air

A vested interest of politics, business and bureaucracy has been strangling the education system

BY COL R HARIHARAN

LAST year, as a non-technical member of a corporate campus selection panel, I asked a third-year graduate engineering student the difference between the GSM and GPRS systems in mobile phones. Pat came the answer: "GPRS is not in our syllabus, sir." A more experienced panel member assured me that the student represented all that was wrong with our educational system. The problem was "at the bottom of the pyramid – schooling" that turned creative and intelligent young people into mindless youth, he added.

Six years ago, while heading the corporate social responsibility project of an IT firm, I had regular interaction with over 60 schools run by the Chennai Corporation and nearly 2,000 high achievers of these schools for about two years. The experience left me horrified at the appalling standards of schools and teachers. The negatives were too many: infrastructure was creaking, most of the kids were barely literate, teachers generally lacked commitment, and leadership was noticeable only in islands of excellence.

At the same time, it was heartwarming to see the strong desire among the students to achieve their goals despite the obstacles. They were living testimony to what Mark Twain said: "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." I was ashamed that as a citizen I had allowed this to happen to our young people.

Unfortunately, this "wisdom of the Bodhi tree" came after nearly 30 years of involvement in Army training at all levels. Despite its system of regimentation, military training produces amazing results. I have seen first-hand how Munusamy or Bhoop Singh, a barely literate school dropout from the backwoods of Himachal Pradesh or Tamil Nadu, changes totally in just a year-and-a-half of training. The lazy and clumsy lout is transformed into a self-confident, disciplined and socially useful member of a team. Army training is always focused and objective-oriented. It teaches even complex systems in easily understandable modules. More than all this, it gives confidence to the soldier to face the odds and learn to overcome them, and work to achieve pre-set goals.

Later in life, for a decade I was involved in corporate training in a big way. The corporate world has taken in many of the good points of military training to improve process management skills and achieve productivity of the highest order. It also focuses on keeping abreast of applied knowledge skills to get the best out of people. These two systems of transformational education provide ample pointers to improve our education system.

Our corporate social responsibility project aimed at identifying and helping over 1200 high achievers through their senior secondary schooling every year. Corporate volunteers helped the kids, mostly living in slums, to hone their skills and learning to perform even better. Our weekend IT classes were a welcome change for the students because we allowed them to design their own learning.

My sessions on spoken English skills taught me that student participation was at the heart of any learning. My classroom session became a dialogue process full of wit and repartee flying all over. There were also poignant moments when all of us saw the stark reality of their lives. An 11-year-old girl left us stunned when she wrote about her "most memorable experience." It was about how she lost the sight of one eye due to repeated fires in the slum where she lived.

The kids were far more creative and worldly wise than upper-class kids. They were a keen lot, ready to work hard to learn more. Their goals were clear and their methods pragmatic. These were qualities I had found markedly absent even among MBA students in the business school where I taught part-time. The whole experience was a revelation for me.

Unfortunately, my experience with the school principals and teachers was the opposite. Few principals showed interest in upgrading their management skills and using modern tools of management. Some principals did not even want to meet us. We found one principal drunk at 10 am, unable to talk coherently! Many principals were appointed on political consideration. Some teachers assured me payment of money under the table started from the time they applied for teacher training.

PIB

Sibal with officials: can he crack the code?

Unless he is watchful, the zealous Minister may lose his job, thanks to the powerful education mafia. It thrives on the inefficiency of the system and will resist any change.

Barring a handful of committed teachers, the rest appeared to have drifted into the job because it provided a cosy nook in the government set-up.

The principals were mostly a demoralized lot because the education administration was highly bureaucratic. This had probably made them part of the insensitive bureaucracy. It was evident in some schools where cartons of computers were lying unopened because the principals did not want the students to "damage" them. One principal told me that, on an average, she had to send 62 reports a month to the administration! Though she might have exaggerated, it was clear paper work choked school administration and red tape killed any initiative. Infrastructure was uniformly bad and maintenance was shoddy. Toilets were too few and unusable. However, a few streetsmart principals knew how to pamper politicians and local MPs to improve their schools.

There was a well-meaning IAS officer heading the education bureaucracy at the corporation headquarters. In consultation with him, we designed a process workshop for the heads of schools to discuss and debate their problems to evolve a set of best practices in consultation with experts to improve the running of the schools. There were no takers for the workshop as the administration did not make attendance mandatory. We simply abandoned the project. So much for private participation in public institutions.

Education holds the key to break class and caste barriers. As a result it is entangled in a whole range of politically explosive issues. As government controls the largest number of schools and colleges, they have become symbols of assertion of political power. Government educational institutions offer seemingly laid back government jobs. So training and appointment of teachers in government schools is a cash cow for the corrupt. This has created vested interests of politics, business and bureaucracy keeping a stranglehold on our educational system as a whole and on government institutions in particular.

Education as the shared responsibility of the State and the Centre has suffered from lack of leadership commitment. It was treated as a proverbial holy cow, fending for itself from the leftovers in the annual budgets. Added to this is the public inertia in voicing the educational needs in loud and clear terms. I am a product of an average small town government school in the 1960s. Now, the middle class has abandoned government schools. Thus government schools have become the refuge of the lower strata of society, who have no voice in the government.

The falling standards of government

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schools and the emphasis on English language skills have opened up business opportunities in running private schools. Globalization of education added more money and glamour to the business. An education mafia of politicians and businessmen is promoting private education to increase its money power and social clout. The government institutions suffering sustained neglect have become hotbeds of politics. In fact, youth wings of political parties in educational institutions have turned them into political testing grounds to promote political and caste violence.

Students clash with police: educational battlefields

The government institutions have become hotbeds of politics. Youth wings of political parties have turned them into political testing grounds to promote caste violence.

THE state has a fundamental responsibility to provide quality education and health care to the citizens. While the private sector can chip in to add value, the government can never palm off its social responsibility on these two counts. We urgently need conceptual, systemic and structural improvements in the way we educate the young.

Union Education Minister Kapil Sibal should be congratulated for daring to reform our education system. The Minister has to free the education system from the bondage of our inertia. It would be a great achievement if he can build a consensus and get the process of change going within the term of the present government. Unless he is watchful, the zealous Minister may lose his job, thanks to the politically powerful education mafia. It thrives on the inefficiency of the present education system and will resist any change.

But we need to adopt a bottom up approach. Peter McLaughlin, headmaster of Doon School, in a recent interview aptly summed up the role of education as ensuring "children become lifelong learners". He added that, today, "a narrow and stifling curriculum in most countries has led students to disengage themselves from the testing regime of the education system. Students are no longer intellectually robust. We need to create a critical mass of robust thinkers."

If that happened, Indians would become responsible and productive members of society. And to achieve that we need to improve the grass-roots schooling at the primary level. We have to redeem education from teaching shops, there is no choice. g

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HIGH ON STOCK EXCHANGE SALARIES

The pay packages fly in the face of the Prime Minister's appeal to curb conspicuous consumption

by GS Sood

As the Indian economy tries to come out of the shadow of the economic downturn, the top honchos of India's stock exchanges are taking home pay packages on a par with – and in one instance even higher than – what their counterparts are getting at most international bourses. This, despite the fact that Corporate Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid, Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh have appealed to the corporate sector to desist from paying excessive remuneration to senior executives and to discourage conspicuous consumption. The Prime Minister went to the extent of issuing a stern warning against non-competitive behaviour and cartelization. Excessive compensation has sparked outrage across the developed world after years of multi-million dollar bonuses paid out to executives, including those of money-losing firms.

NSE, generally perceived as a government firm considering most of its promoters are public institutions, actually filed a petition in Delhi against the CIC, stating that it is a non-government private-sector company and hence should be exempt from providing information under the RTI. It argued that its accounts are not submitted to the CAG and it is also not a listed company and therefore under no obligation to divulge information to the public under RTI. The compensation levels at NSE for its top brass are extremely high even by private sector standards but they are astronomical considering that it enjoys a virtual monopoly.

Its monopoly is evident from the fact that its Gross Profit Margin stood at 70 per cent. Being a private sector monopoly, one fails to understand as to why no serious steps are taken to promote competition and reduce cost of transaction to benefit millions of retail investors and offer them improved services. This appears to be a classic case of a private sector firm enjoying a near-monopoly depriving consumers of cost and service efficiency.

Is the compensation committee of the NSE impacted by the "Lake Wobegon Effect", widely cited internationally as a potential cause for rising CEO pay? Do we have the home-grown

Corporate Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid (left) and Planning Commission Dy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia (right) have appealed to the corporate sector to desist from paying excessive remuneration to senior executives

Ravi Narain

Chitra Ramkrishna

Madhu Kannan

Some of the really fat cats

AMONG all the exchanges in India, the compensation levels at the National Stock Exchange (NSE) for its top managers, including the MD and Deputy MD, are mind-boggling. The payouts to MD Ravi Narain (Rs 6.89 crore plus perks) and Deputy MD Chitra Ramkrishna (Rs 4.21 crore plus perks) constitute about 1.5 per cent of NSE's consolidated net profit of around Rs 750 crore for 2009. Narain's compensation package is higher than the basic salary of London Stock Exhange CEO Xavier Roulet (Rs 5.6 crore) and almost on a par with New York Stock Exchange Euronext CEO Jean-Fancois Theodore (around Rs 7 crore).

Other highly paid officials of Indian stock exchanges for 2008-09 include Madhu Kannan, CEO, Bombay Stock Exchange (Rs 1.6 crore), R Ramaseshan, CEO, National Commodity & Derivatives Exchange or NCDEX (Rs 1.5 crore), and Joseph Massey, MD & CEO, MCX (Rs 1.39 crore)

version of Richard Grasso (the ex-NYSE chief against whom New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer filed a lawsuit seeking return of some of Grasso's exorbitant pay package) in India? The NSE honchos are the ones who will take the biggest hit under any regulation on remuneration and incentives in the financial sector or even emergence of competition in their segments of business.

If NSE is a for-profit, private-sector entity, how is it in a position to ensure support of all stakeholders to perpetuate its market monopoly? BSE is not able to fight back and all regional stock exchanges are virtually dead. NSE makes huge profits out of cash and F & O segment and is not known to be proactive in developing new market segments. It's little wonder that, because of lack of competition, all the new market segments such as corporate bond market, wholesale debt market, and the like have failed miserably. India might have suffered a huge opportunity loss due to lack of deepening and widening of financial markets. Are the extremely high compensation levels for the NSE top brass producing perverse results and anti-competitive outcomes?

We need to take lessons from the failure of the US financial system, where investment bankers drawing huge salaries resorted to uncontrolled financial innovation and hid the real worth of assets due to laxity on part of the credit rating agencies. Salaries in institutions that are self-regulatory and enjoy some sort of monopoly cannot have the same salary and incentive structure as a purely commercial enterprise, whose primary motive is maximizing profits. One such institution is the NSE which enjoys a monopoly in the country in the equity derivatives segment.

The government should therefore cap the salaries drawn by executives working for institutions such as credit rating agencies, stock exchanges and clearing corporations which have a sensitive role to play in the country's financial sector rather than constraining private sector companies across the board. g

MASTERMIND
bs yeddyurappa

Karnataka's LOH PURUSH

The Chief Minister is a man of grassroots determination, guided by basic instinct, superstition and an iron will

by TR Ramachandran

HAVING built the Bharatiya Janata Party singlehandedly in Karnataka and become the saffron brigade's first Chief Minister in the South, Bookanakere Siddalingappa Yeddyurappa has taken giant strides over less than four decades to achieve his dream of becoming the political numero uno of his home state.

A simple and god-fearing person, though short-tempered, he has restored the pride of the Lingayat community which constitutes about 15-16 per cent of the population in Karnataka. The installation of a Lingayat Chief Minister after 19 years was significant as this dominant community had been insulted by Rajiv Gandhi's summary dismissal of Veerendra Patil in the early 1990s. What had rubbed salt into the wound was that Patil was seriously ill at the time. The Lingayats bided their time and waited to settle scores with the Congress.

Yeddyurappa is a son of the soil and does not belong to the English-speaking elite. He set out to rally the Lingayats in the state, irrespective of earlier affiliations and loyalties. It helped the BJP secure an unbelievable majority on its own in the Assembly. And Yeddyurappa was in place to enjoy a five-year term as Chief Minister without hiccups.

This was all the sweeter as he had earlier had a seven-day stint as Chief Minister in November 2007, when his tenure was cut short due to the Janata Dal (Secular) refusal to support his government. There had been much drama as the Assembly was kept in suspended animation before the JD (S) legislators agreed to support the BJP government. But that was not to be. On the day Yeddyurappa was to prove his majority in the Assembly, the JD (S) withdrew support. The CM was compelled to resign and the House was dissolved.

In February 2006, Yeddyurappa had become Deputy Chief Minister after former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda's JD(S) snapped ties with the Congress and formed a coalition government with BJP support. The Chief Ministership was of such disproportionate importance that moral niceties were jettisoned. Even Deve Gowda's son, HD Kumaraswamy, achieved this short-term objective. The JD (S)-BJP coalition agreed on a swap of the Chief Ministership after 20 months. However, at the end of its term, the BJP withdrew support to the Kumaraswamy government because, in October 2005, the JD (S) had failed to keep its side of the bargain of transferring power to the BJP.

Another calculated move by Yeddyurappa was to win over disenchanted Lingayats from the Congress fold. Several resigned their Assembly seats and joined hands with him. He gave them tickets to contest again. Most returned to the House and have become Ministers.

In this year's general election, Yeddyurappa ensured that his and his family's imprint was stamped on Shimoga district – former bastion of veteran Congress leader and former Karnataka Chief Minister S Bangarappa for four decades. Yeddyurappa was overjoyed when son Raghavendra defeated Bangarappa in Shimoga and debuted in the Lok Sabha. The credit goes to the

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Talisman of a bungalow

Like most politicians, BS Yeddyurappa is superstitious. As the seniormost member of the House, he was allotted a spacious bungalow in front of the Bangalore Turf Club. He believes that the house brought him luck – he not only regained his position as Leader of the Opposition but went on to become Finance Minister, the stepping stone to becoming Deputy Chief Minister and thereafter Chief Minister. Thus, he has never shifted to the official CM's residence, Anugraha. However, he has never admitted that he does not want to shift to Anugraha as it is believed to have some *Vaastu dosh*.

Lingayats for closing ranks.

Yeddyurappa has set a trend in Karnataka which can be replicated in other States if the Congress alienates key castes. Their role in backing their own nominee for Chief Ministership has been overlooked. The Vokkaligas are the other significant caste in Karnataka, accounting for 13-14 per cent of the electorate.

His political career began in 1970 when he was appointed secretary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Shikarpur unit. He became a legislator for the first time in 1983 from Shikaripura and now represents the constituency for the sixth time. Having lost the Assembly election in 1999, he entered the Karnataka Legislative Council in 2000 and remained an MLC till 2004.

He has waged a relentless struggle for farmers' welfare, especially as Leader of the Opposition. It paved the way to Chief Ministership. As Finance Minister – a portfolio he retains even as Chief Minister – he reduced the interest rates of cooperative loans to farmers to 7 per cent and subsequently to 4 per cent. Karnataka is the only State in the country to do this. He also fought tenaciously for waiver of the farmer loans as Leader of the Opposition. He described his 2009-10 Budget as unique because all sections of society will benefit. Yeddyurappa is probably the only Chief Minister in the country to take the oath of office in the name of farmers.

IN another first, he presents a report to the people after every 100 days of his government. Two reports in the form of booklets have already been released about the achievements of his government and the third one is in the pipeline. He emphasizes that anyone having doubts about his government's achievements can use the RTI Act.

But Yeddyurappa is not without critics – within the BJP and without. His ministerial colleagues are not too happy with the fact that Cabinet member Shobha Karandlayje is his girlfriend. At all crucial meetings, she has pride of place next to the Chief Minister. She travels with him and briefs the media about Cabinet meetings. Karandlayje has the reputation for able administrator that Yeddyurappa lacks. Like him, she has risen from the ranks. She worked with the BJP's frontal organization in the Mangalore area to which she belongs. Yeddyurappa has put every Minister in charge of a district and she is the overseer for Mangalore. Recently, she was praised for her conduction of the famed Dussehra celebrations in Mysore.

The Chief Minister has also been criticized for allocating funds to various religious organizations and charities in an obvious bid to seek support.

Born on February 27, 1943, in a farmer family, he was schooled in Mandya. Relatives recall that he was good in studies and kabaddi was his favourite sport. He began contributing to the family earnings at an early age by selling lemons on a cycle. He had marketing skills as he was able to convince people that lemons added taste to curry. He graduated in arts from Bengaluru. During the Emergency (1975-77), he spent 45 days in the Shimoga and Bellary prisons.

Yeddyurappa also has his share of controversy. His wife, Maitradevi, was the daughter of a rice mill owner in Shimoga where Yeddyurappa worked briefly. She died under mysterious circumstances. She is said to have fallen into a *sump* (an underground water tank) in their Vinoba Nagar house and drowned. This is suspicious as *sump*s are not very deep. A criminal complaint filed against him in a Shimoga First Class Judicial Magistrate's court in February is pending. The original complaint, filed by HV Manjunath, stated the deceased died after she fell into a *sump* on October 16, 2004. However, another complaint by a Seshadri alleged that Yeddyurappa assaulted his wife.

Though he has five children, two sons and three daughters, a recent visit to China has made him a convert to the two-child norm.

Yeddyurappa's popularity with the people has had its ups and downs. He has earned public wrath by cutting down nearly 3,000 trees in the name of widening Bengaluru's roads and to accommodate the proposed metro rail project. g

In this year's general election, Yeddyurappa ensured that his and his family's imprint was stamped on Shimoga district – former bastion of veteran Congress leader and former Chief Minister S Bangarappa for four decades.

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We have to make the mi

The former Vice-Chief recalls postings in India's corners, in mountains a

I AM a second generation soldier. In those days, sons used to step into their fathers' shoes. As a kid, I was very impressed by the glamour of military uniform. I studied at King George's School and Sainik Schools. My last Sainik School, from where I completed Class XI, was in Jamnagar.

Like me, a majority of those joining the Army were second generation. There was a large number of candidates from north India. I cleared the written exam for the National Defence Academy. I appeared before the Service Selection Board for five days of interviews. The interviews were meant to check the psychology, innovativeness and team spirit of the recruit who had to be moulded into a leader.

There were 20 candidates. We were shown pictures and then asked to write a story in 60 seconds. We had to speak on a given topic for two minutes. Teams of five candidates were formed to clear the obstacles. Last was an IQ test.

I cleared everything and joined the National Defence Academy in 1965. I was commissioned as an officer in the Bombay Sappers from the Indian Military Academy in June 1969. I chose the engineering corps. It plays a vital role in military operations. We have a unit of 800 jawans and 30 officers.We can make bridges quickly and operational tracks. It was a very challenging posting. In 1971, I joined the Military Engineering College. Then I did MTech from IIT, Delhi.

In 1969 my first posting as 2nd Lieutenant was in Arunachal Pradesh. In 1971, when the Indo-Pakistan war took place, I was transferred to Fazilka as Lieutenant.

When I joined the Army, my dream was to be a paratrooper. When I was 26 years old, I joined the parabrigade. In the Army, to be a part of Para was considered prestigious. I underwent rigorous training and I was there for five years. I was posted near Harsil in Uttarkashi. The training was at 9,000 feet and above. I really enjoyed the posting.

Then I spent three years in Sikkim, commanding the engineering regiment. We managed our troops there at 14,000 feet. It was very beautiful but it is an operational area.We have eyeball-to-eyeball contact at the border in Sikkim. We had to be constantly on the alert. We used to have regular flag meetings. Local commandant meetings were routine. We have a BPTA (Border Personnel Treaty Agreement) there with China. It is to control escalation of tension.

After that I went to the higher command course in Mhow

and transferred to the general cadre. I had the unique honour of commanding the only Parachute Field Company of the Corps of Engineers as well as an engineer regiment. I am the only engineer officer to have commanded a Rashtriya Rifles sector in the Kashmir Valley. Under my command, the sector achieved stupendous results including neutralizing a substantial number of hardcore terrorists while simultane-

I had the honour of commanding the only parachute field company of the Corps of Engineers as well as an engineer regiment. I am the only engineer officer to have commanded a Rashtriya Rifles sector

ilitary more relevant

s and deserts, and being a paratrooper as well as an engineer

RAJEEV DABRAL

ously making friends with the local populace.

I served in Operation Vijay during the Kargil war. Kupwara is one district where most of the activities by Pakistan-trained terrorists take place. The Kupwara posting was one of my most challenging postings and I was awarded the Sena Medal for it.

As G-o-C, Ahmedabad, I looked after two important borders – the Rann of Kutch and Barmer in Rajasthan. It was another fascinating posting. We had to coordinate with the Coast Guard and BSF to control infiltration in the guise of fishermen. I was transferred as Lt Gen, Corps at Jalandhar to look after all of Punjab. I am happy I commanded an infantry division in the desert during Operation Parakram and a Corps in Punjab.

The Indian military has to be ready for terrorism and fourth generation war games. We have challenges to face– cyber wars, media wars, psycho wars and the war against non-state players

AFTER this, I was promoted as Army Commander, Jalandhar. Thereafter, I was posted as the commander of India's most important command, Southern Command. It is the largest command. It starts from Jaisalmer and covers the entire peninsula. The command has its own plane and helicopters. I used to travel 15 days in a month. We conceptualized and realized a large number of projects to enhance operational contingencies and administrative efficiency. During this period, the Southern Army undertook some major military manoeuvres and conducted the 4th CISM World Military Games. I was made Honorary Aide-de-Camp to the President of India during this period. For my contribution as commander of the Southern Army field force, I was decorated with the Param Vishisht Seva Medal.

I assumed charge as Vice-Chief of Army Staff on January 1, 2009. This posting is a window to the Ministry of Defence.

From 1969 to 2009, I constantly worked hard. I never left work pending on my table.

After serving 40 years, I feel the need for greater transparency, greater accountability. We have to shed old traditions. We have to make the military more relevant. Performance should be given priority over seniority to make the military vibrant for the future.

We should not prepare for the last war but for the future war. The dimensions of war are changing. The Indian military has to be ready for terrorism and fourth generation war games. We have challenges to face – cyber wars, media wars, psycho wars and the war against non-state players.

I want to say to the youth of India that the Army will always present a noble and fascinating career to serve the country purposefully.

My first innings was very good and now, in my second, after retirement, I will serve the nation in whichever way it wants me to serve. g

birthdays

IAS officers' birthdays | November 16, '09–December 15, '09

Arvind Mehta
16-11-1960
CADRE: HIMACHAL PRADESH
amehta@ias.nic.in

Alka Kala
16-11-1949
CADRE: RAJASTHAN
kalaalka@ias.nic.in

Raminder Singh Gujral
17-11-1953
CADRE: HARYANA
gujralrs@ias.nic.in

BV Selvaraj
17-11-1953
CADRE: UNION TERRITORY
selvaraj@ias.nic.in

Idzes Angmo Kundan
18-11-1969
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
kundania@ias.nic.in

Gauri Singh
18-11-1963
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
sgauri@ias.nic.in

Md Sharif Alam
19-11-1949
CADRE: BIHAR
m.s.alam@ias.nic.in

Debashish Sircar
19-11-1957
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
sircard@ias.nic.in

VM Gopala Menon
20-11-1955
CADRE: KERALA
menonvmg@ias.nic.in

Shubhanjan Das
20-11-1976
CADRE: WEST BENGAL
shubhanjan.d@ias.nic.in

Girish Chandra Murmu
21-11-1959
CADRE: GUJARAT
gcmurmu@ias.nic.in

Mehboob Iqbal
21-11-1951
CADRE: JAMMU & KASHMIR
iqbalm@ias.nic.in

Nivedita P Haran
22-11-1954
CADRE: KERALA
harannp@ias.nic.in

Harjit Inder Singh Grewal
23-11-1955
CADRE: PUNJAB
grewalhi@ias.nic.in

Dipak Ghosh
23-11-1953
CADRE: WEST BENGAL
dipakghosh.ias@ias.nic.in

R Christodas Gandhi
24-11-1952
CADRE: TAMIL NADU
gandhirc@ias.nic.in

Rakesh Garg
24-11-1956
CADRE: UTTAR PRADESH
gargr@ias.nic.in

Joy Chandra Goswami
25-11-1951
CADRE: ASSAM-MEGHALAYA
goswamij@ias.nic.in

Ajay Pal Singh
25-11-1962
CADRE: CHHATTISGARH
sajaypal@ias.nic.in

Ahmed Nadeem
26-11-1972
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
nadeema@ias.nic.in

Anita Karwal
26-11-1962
CADRE: GUJARAT
karwala@ias.nic.in

Viswapati Trivedi
27-11-1954
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
triviswa@ias.nic.in

CJ Venugopal
27-11-1964
CADRE: ORISSA
vgopalcj@ias.nic.in

Rashmi Verma
28-11-1958
CADRE: BIHAR
vrashmi82@ias.nic.in

Abhilaksh S Likhi
29-11-1966
CADRE: HARYANA
likhias@ias.nic.in

Ramesh Bindurao Zalki
30-11-1953
CADRE: KARNATAKA
zalkirb@ias.nic.in

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Bhudev Basumatari
01-12-1950
CADRE: ASSAM-MEGHALAYA
bhudev@ias.nic.in

Aditya Swaroop
01-12-1954
CADRE: JHARKHAND
swaroopa@ias.nic.in

L Daniel Longchar
01-12-1952
CADRE: NAGALAND
longchar.ld@ias.nic.in

Tashi Tobden
01-12-1948
CADRE: SIKKIM
tobdent@ias.nic.in

Busani Venkateswara Rao
02-12-1959
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
raobv@ias.nic.in

Ashwini Kumar
02-12-1963
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
kaswini@ias.nic.in

Mebanshailang R Synrem
03-12-1975
CADRE: ASSAM-MEGHALAYA
synremmr@ias.nic.in

Uma Kant Panwar
03-12-1966
CADRE: UTTARAKHAND
panwaruk@ias.nic.in

Indu Kumar Pande
04-12-1949
CADRE: UTTARAKHAND
pandeik@ias.nic.in

AK Wasnik
04-12-1953
CADRE: UNION TERRITORY
ak.wasnik@ias.nic.in

Nilaya Mitesh
05-12-1965
CADRE: KARNATAKA
miteshn@ias.nic.in

Ajoy Sharma
05-12-1973
CADRE: PUNJAB
sajoy@ias.nic.in

Arun Kumar Singh
07-12-1963
CADRE: JHARKHAND
singhak1@ias.nic.in

B Thawang Konyak
07-12-1952
CADRE: NAGALAND
konyak.bt@ias.nic.in

Ameising Luikham
08-12-1958
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
luikhama@ias.nic.in

Aneeta C Meshram
08-12-1971
CADRE: UTTAR PRADESH
acmesram@ias.nic.in

Rajesh Kumar Yadav
09-12-1973
CADRE: RAJASTHAN
yrajeshk@ias.nic.in

Radhika Jha
09-12-1976
CADRE: SIKKIM
sradhika@ias.nic.in

Laxmi Priya G
10-12-1978
CADRE: TAMIL NADU
laxmipriya.ias@ias.nic.in

Suresh Kumar Vashist
11-12-1972
CADRE: ORISSA
vashists@ias.nic.in

Ved Prakash Narayan Singh
12-12-1949
CADRE: JHARKHAND
vpn.singh@ias.nic.in

V Chhiber
12-12-1955
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
chhiberv@ias.nic.in

BK Kharel
12-12-1952
CADRE: SIKKIM
bk.kharel@ias.nic.in

Yatendra Kumar
13-12-1967
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
kumary1@ias.nic.in

Parag Jain
14-12-1972
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
jainp3@ias.nic.in

Naba Kumar Das
15-12-1952
CADRE: ASSAM-MEGHALAYA
dasnk@ias.nic.in

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K Nityanandam
16-11-1951
CADRE: GUJARAT
nityanandam@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Ranbir Singh Sharma
16-11-1955
CADRE: HARYANA
ranbir@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

RA Sonawane
17-11-1950
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
sonawane@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Sonia Narang
17-11-1975
CADRE: KARNATAKA
sonia@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Raman Kakkar
18-11-1949
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
ramankakkar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Akhilesh Mehrotra
18-11-1948
CADRE: UTTAR PRADESH
amehrotra@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

BR Gwala
19-11-1948
CADRE: RAJASTHAN
gwala@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

P Thamaraikannan
19-11-1962
CADRE: TAMIL NADU
thamaraikannan@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Niraj Kumar Singh
20-11-1969
CADRE: WEST BENGAL
nirajks@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

P Chandrasekharan
21-11-1955
CADRE: KERALA
chandrasekhara@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

PK Srivastava
21-11-1952
CADRE: AGMUT
pksrivastava@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Ajit Singh Bedi
22-11-1950
CADRE: ORISSA
ajitsinghbedi@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

A Sudhakar Rao
22-11-1963
CADRE: SIKKIM
sudhakar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Bhushan Kumar Garg
22-11-1956
CADRE: PUNJAB
bkgarg@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

NS Randhawa
23-11-1948
CADRE: AGMUT
randhawa@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

K Narasimha Reddy
23-11-1950
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
narasimhareddy@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Swagat Das
24-11-1964
CADRE: CHHATTISGARH
swagatdas@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Sumit Chaturvedi
24-11-1974
CADRE: WEST BENGAL
sumit@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Anju Gupta
25-11-1963
CADRE: UTTARAKHAND
anjugupta@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Farooq Ahmad
25-11-1951
CADRE: JAMMU & KASHMIR
farooq@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Amrendra Kumar Singh
26-11-1948
CADRE: BIHAR
amrendraksingh@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

TJ Jose
26-11-1956
CADRE: KERALA
jose@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Makrand Deoskar
27-11-1972
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
mdeoskar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Prashakha Mathur
27-11-1969
CADRE: RAJASTHAN
prashakha@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Geetha Johari
28-11-1957
CADRE: GUJARAT
jgeetha@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

S Murugan
28-11-1972
CADRE: KARNATAKA
smurugan@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

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Ajay Kumar
29-11-1950
CADRE: UTTARAKHAND
ajaykumar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Nepal Chandra Das
30-11-1955
CADRE: MANIPUR-TRIPURA
ncdas@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Khagen Sharma
01-12-1955
CADRE: ASSAM- MEGHALAYA
ksarma@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

MV Chakhesang
01-12-1949
CADRE: NAGALAND
mvchakhesang@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Ram Singh Meena
02-12-1958
CADRE: UTTARAKHAND
meena@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Pankaj Kumar Dutta
03-12-1951
CADRE: WEST BENGAL
pankajkdutta@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Devendra Dutt Misra
03-12-1953
CADRE: UTTAR PRADESH
ddmisra@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Parshuram Mathur
04-12-1953
CADRE: MADHYA PRADESH
mathur@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Shiv Pal Singh Verma
04-12-1954
CADRE: HIMACHAL PRADESH
spsverma@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Surinder Kumar
04-12-1959
CADRE: JAMMU & KASHMIR
surinderkumar@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Kuldeep Singh
05-12-1966
CADRE: PUNJAB
kuldeepsingh@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Nehchal Sandhu
06-12-1951
CADRE: BIHAR
nehchalsandhu@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Matta Ravi Kiran
07-12-1967
CADRE: HARYANA
mrkiran@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

CM Ravindran
08-12-1950
CADRE: SIKKIM
ravindran@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Vikram Singh Mann
08-12-1970
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
vsmann@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Vijay Prakash
09-12-1968
CADRE: UTTAR PRADESH
vijayprakash@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

N Sambasiva Rao
10-12-1957
CADRE: ANDHRA PRADESH
sambasiva@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Heramb Nath Deb
10-12-1953
CADRE: BIHAR
hndeb@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

RC Shrivastava
11-12-1956
CADRE: CHHATTISGARH
rcshrivastava@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

DG Shrirao
11-12-1952
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
shrirao@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

AK Upadhyay
12-12-1952
CADRE: ORISSA
ak_upadhyay@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Mohd BS Yasin
13-12-1959
CADRE: KERALA
yasin@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

R Chandra Nathan
13-12-1961
CADRE: ASSAM-MEGHALAYA
rchandranathan@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Sadanand Vasant Date
14-12-1966
CADRE: MAHARASHTRA
svdate@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

Venugopal N
14-12-1967
CADRE: HIMACHAL PRADESH
nvenugopal@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

PC Thakur
15-12-1956
CADRE: GUJARAT
pcthakur@mail.svpnpa.gov.in

For the complete list, see www.indianbuzz.com

TRACKING

For a complete list of appointments & retirements, see ***www.gfilesindia.com***

URVASHI GULATI
The 1975-batch IAS officer of the Haryana cadre has been appointed Chief Secretary of Haryana.

AK UPADHYAYA
The 1975-batch IAS officer of the Bihar cadre is now Secretary, Youth Affairs.

T SRINIVASAN
The 1975-batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre has become Chief Secretary of Rajasthan.

VENKATESH
The 1988-batch IAS officer of the UP cadre has been appointed CVO of NTPC.

RAJESH SINHA
The 1994-batch IAS officer of the Kerala cadre is now Registrar of Delhi University.

ANURADHA VEMOURI
The 1991-batch IFS officer of the UP cadre has been made Director, Health and Planning.

ATUL CHATURVEDI
The 1974-batch IAS officer of the UP cadre has been appointed Secretary, Steel.

S KRISHNAN
The 1975-batch IAS officer of the UK cadre has become Secretary, Fertilizers.

KAMAL DEEP SINGH
The 1996-batch IDAS officer has been made Deputy Secretary, Department of AIDS Control.

DEEPAK GHOSH
The 1995-batch IAS officer of the West Bengal cadre has been appointed Director, Census Operation, West Bengal.

K CHANDRAMOULI
The 1975-batch IAS officer of the UP cadre is now Secretary, Department of AIDS Control.

AMITABH RANJAN
The 1988-batch IPS officer of the Manipur-Tripura cadre has been promoted to Joint Director in the IB.

DN SINGH
The 1987-batch IFS officer of the Union Territory cadre has been made Director, Defence.

ANIL KUMAR
The 1973-batch IAS officer of the UP cadre has been posted as Secretary, Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs.

RAJIV RAI
The 1991-batch CSS officer has become Director, Personnel in the Government of India.

VANDITA KAUL
The 1989-batch IPS officer is now Director, Expenditure in the Government of India.

ANISH DAYAL SINGH
The 1988-batch IPS officer of the Manipur-Tripura cadre has been promoted to Joint Director in the IB.

KS CHUG
The 1993-batch CSS officer has joined as Director, Personnel in the Government of India.

YOGENDRA KUMAR
The 1977-batch IFS officer has been appointed Ambassador to the Philippines.

RK KAMESHWAR SIMHUM BATLA
The 1984-batch IIS officer has been posted as Joint Secretary, Health.

STUTI NARAIN KACKAR
The 1974-batch IAS officer of the UP cadre will now head the Board for Reconstruction of Public Sector Enterprises.

VK KAPOOR
The 1972-batch IAS officer of the Chhattisgarh cadre has been appointed Administrative Member CAT, Jodhpur Bench.

RAJNEESH KUMAR MAHAJAN
The 1987-batch IAS officer of the Bihar cadre is now Joint Secretary, Coal.

PJ MATHEW
The 1983-batch IA & AS, AG (C&RA) officer of the Andhra Pradesh cadre has become Principal Accountant General, Karnataka.

AK CHAUDHARY
The 1972-batch IAS officer has been appointed Chief Information Commissioner in Bihar.

ALOK PERTI
The 1977-batch IAS officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre has been appointed Additional Secretary, Coal.

BHAGWANT SINGH BISHNOI
The 1983-batch IFS officer will be Ambassador to Ethiopia.

SHOBIT JAIN
The 2000-batch IAS officer of the Madhya Pradesh cadre has been appointed Director, Census Operation, MP.

HP SAHOO
The 1998-batch IAS officer of the Union Territory cadre has been appointed Director, Census Operation, Mizoram.

Moving On: ias and ips officers retiring in November 2009

ASSAM-MEGHALAYA
Alok Jain (1974)

ANDHRA PRADESH
S Pradeep K Naidu (1973)

BIHAR
Md Sharif Alam (1994)

GUJARAT
S Chandrasekhar (1974)

HARYANA
Rajni Razdan (1973)

HIMACHAL PRADESH
Rakesh Kaushal (1991)

J&K
KB Jandial (1995)

KERALA
Gopal K Pillai (1972)

NAGALAND
TN Mannen (1976)

ORISSA
RN Das (1988)

PUNJAB
Hans Raj Megh (1990)

RAJASTHAN
Alka Kala (1974)

TAMIL NADU
Lalitha Kumar (1974)

UNION TERRITORY
XK Mahto (1990)

ips

JHARKHAND
VM Diwakar (1974)

MADHYA PRADESH
Raman Kakkar (1973)

MAHARASHTRA
BJ Kangale (1984)

NAGALAND
MV Chakhesang (1986)

UTTAR PRADESH
Uma Nath Singh (1995)

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Invest, don't track the market

THE sharp rise in the Sensex has brought back fear; investors have started wondering if the markets are nearing a bubble zone. It is said that though the markets have started looking expensive, the continued inflows are being driven more by a desire to avoid underperformance than firm conviction in the fundamentals. Contrary to this, despite the rich valuations compared to the rest of the world, the Indian growth story appears more secure than in many other countries. The earnings growth and GDP are strong enough to sustain the valuations and attract abundant liquidity in a world ready to chase a few growth stories due to abysmally low returns on deposits.

The Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council has projected GDP growth at 6.5 per cent for 2009-10. The growth has been scaled up due to strong recovery in the industrial sector with expectations of decline in agriculture output. The Council has also raised concerns about inflation and fiscal deficit with inflation seen to be rising to 6 per cent by March-end and consolidated fiscal deficit expected to cross 10 per cent for 2009-10. But it says that the improving trend is unlikely to prompt any immediate withdrawal of stimulus measures or tightening of monetary policy.

The Indian market may continue to do well. The domestic demand-driven economic expansion and emergence of strong domestic institutional investors give a further edge to the country. Though retail investors are yet to totally return to the markets, FIIs have been furiously buying in India. The fact that big investments are likely to be made by insurance companies may further extend the current bull run. The Q2 performance of the corporate sector has reaffirmed the growth story being firmly in place. But the fact that the corporate sector has planned to raise a huge amount of funds from the capital market may suck substantial liquidity, making the markets correct.

The Indian markets have developed a tendency to move in tandem with other markets around the world. If the global recovery is not as strong as anticipated, it can lead to a big sell-off across the markets in the short term. Any sign of nervousness due to, say, US economic data may create a lot of volatility in markets across the world. Also, large economies such as the US and UK will ultimately have to adjust to a savings-oriented scenario from the present consumption-led one.

The fact that the corporate sector plans to raise a huge amount of funds from the capital market may suck substantial liquidity, making the markets correct

This could have repercussions for emerging markets, especially through exports.

Sharp rallies in the first year of recovery are typically followed by almost horizontal movement in stocks for quite some time. Since the markets have gone up too much too soon and too fast, it is high time they correct or at least take a breather. Since India is likely to report very high earnings for 2009 as against most other countries, more capital may be seen to be flowing its way. In late September, inflows into Indian equity funds hit a nine-week high. MSCI India has done far better than the average in the last quarter by rising almost 10 per cent. But the improvement in business conditions in the developed countries may make the flow of these funds dwindle, making the liquidity-driven rally in equities slow down.

Investors are advised not to track the direction of the market while picking stocks. A rally in small and mid cap stocks hitherto beaten down during the crisis may happen in view of the excellent Q2 results produced by many of them. Any correction whatsoever is not likely to be as severe as that of 2008.

Apar Industries

(CMP Rs 162)

THE company is the market leader in transformer oils with over 55 per cent market share in India under the brand POWEROIL with domestic customers such as BHEL, Emco, Crompton Greaves, Bharat Bijlee and Alstom. It is the second largest manufacturer of conductors in India with around 25 per cent market share after Sterlite Technologies. Apar is also the largest exporter of conductors from India and exports to over 43 countries.

Power transformers account for around 70 per cent of the transformers market and is likely to see a huge demand due to massive increase in capex expected in the power transmission sector. The company's profitability was adversely affected due to forex losses in the recent past. However, since all the losses are already accounted for and the demand for the company's products is almost inelastic, things should improve remarkably in coming days. At a CMP of Rs 162, the stock trades at around 8x and 6x its FY2010 and 2011 estimated earnings. Volatility in foreign exchange and raw material prices remain major areas of concern for the company. g

The author has no exposure in the stock recommended in this column. gfiles does not accept responsibility for investment decisions by readers of this column. Investment-related queries may be sent to gfilesindia@gmail.com with Dr Sood's name in the subject line.

Sycophancy gets a dousing this Diwali

DIWALI is a time for propitiating not only the gods, but their equivalents – bosses –in government departments and Ministries. So the bosses are flooded with costly gifts from those trying to curry favour with them. And, even strangers are not barred from entering the big man's house during this season.

However, this year, those who attempted this annual rite with Delhi Chief Secretary Rakesh Mehta were in for a rude shock. They found the Chanakyapuri residence of the 1975 IAS officer of the AGMUT cadre out of bounds. "Sorry, sir, no one is allowed inside without

appointment," said the guards. But, to make an appointment, the mobile number is required. The desperate types sought the number from the guards. The terse reply was: "We are not permitted to give you the number."

Now, will other bureaucrats like to follow Mehta's example next Diwali?

UP's god of big contractors

FOR as long as most people can remember, the district authorities of the UP Jal Nigam have always allotted contracts

for all work to small contractors – disbursing the work among a number of them. That is the norm in most States. But everything has changed since Navneet Sehgal became Chairman of the Jal Nigam.

Sehgal is a powerful officer – being Secretary, Urban Development and Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Mayawati. He has instructed his officers not to allot partial work to contractors. That means one contractor will carry out all the Jal Nigam work in one district. The logic being cited is that this ensures efficiency.

The work in a district is worth over a thousand crore rupees. So small contractors are out. Recently, a Mumbai-based contractor benefitted hugely from Sehgal's new system.

Caution no mention

NO sooner do Union Cabinet meetings get over, the top secret files are handed to the Additional Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat. The agenda papers are also collected immediately. However, some Ministers have been leaving clutching a bunch of files and returning the agenda papers the next day by special courier.

As a precaution, controversial and important items are included in the agenda only at the last minute. The agenda papers are circulated after the meeting has been

called to order with the Prime Minister in the chair. And, the papers are collected immediately after the item has been discussed.

So, when Railways Minister Mamata Banerjee, and Fertilizer and Chemicals Minister MK Azhagiri carried away agenda papers from a meeting, it created quite a flutter.

Steel turns spic

THE Steel Ministry in Udyog Bhavan has had a face-lift, thanks to a bureaucrat who is a cleanliness freak. Dr Dalip

ILLUSTRATIONS: ARUNA

Singh, a 1982-batch Haryana cadre officer, cannot tolerate a dirty office and has initiated this cleanliness drive. When necessary, he personally meets the person in charge of sweeping. Otherwise, a Deputy Secretary meets the sweepers every Tuesday.

The sweepers are pleasantly surprised at this recognition of their role. After years of being ignored, their work is being accorded importance. g

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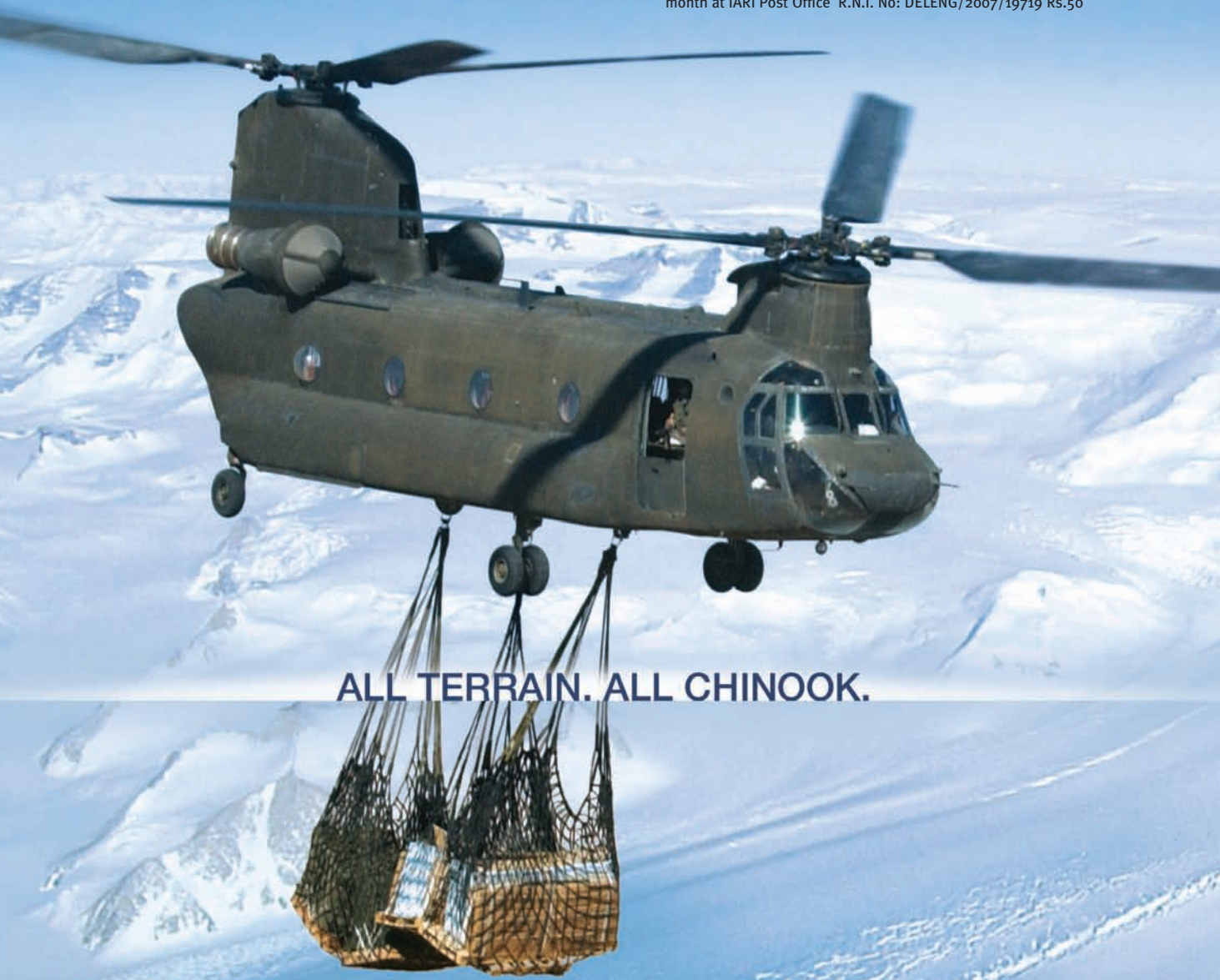

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